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### **Commissioner of Education Authorizes Full Day Preschool Waivers for Elizabeth and Passaic School Districts**

Commissioner of Education Vito A. Gagliardi, Sr. authorized waivers from the requirement to provide full day preschool programs for their three- and four-year-old children for the Passaic and Elizabeth school districts. The Commissioner authorized these waivers pursuant to the proposed Urban Education Reform Early Childhood Regulations. Under those regulations, the Commissioner may authorize a waiver if the assistant commissioner of Early Childhood Education and the assistant commissioner of Facilities and Transportation certify that it is impossible for a district to provide a full-day, full-year preschool program to all prospective three- and four-year-olds by September 2001.

Commissioner Gagliardi, today directed the Passaic School District to implement its contingency plan submitted to the department on August 27, 2001 which indicates that the district will serve four-year-olds in a full-day program and as many three-year-olds in a half-day program as capacity allows. The Commissioner directed Elizabeth to serve all three- and four-year-old children currently placed in full-day programs. Four-year-old children waiting for classroom space will be placed in a full-day program and three-year-olds will be placed in half-day programs, as space becomes available. The two school districts had been expected to provide full day preschool programs for all children already registered, but they were unable to do so.

The Commissioner also directed the superintendent of Elizabeth work with the Department of Education to develop a plan addressing their capacity shortfall with timelines as to when full-day, full-year early childhood education programs for all three- and four-year-olds will be provided. This plan must be completed and submitted to the department no later than September 18, 2001. Passaic has already submitted such a plan.

One exception to this directive is that three-year-old children whose parents are participating in the Work First New Jersey program through the Department of Human Services must be served in a full day-program.

"Both the state and the leadership of the districts are disappointed that every child in Elizabeth and Passaic cannot be served with a full-day preschool program on the first day of school," said Commissioner Gagliardi. "The Department will continue to work closely with these districts to resolve any issues that are delaying the full implementation of the preschool requirement. It must be pointed out that virtually all of the Abbott districts are on track to provide the full-day, full-year program for the start of the school year."

"New Jersey is providing the highest quality, most expansive public preschool program in the nation, said Gagliardi. "There are no other states providing a full-day, full-year educationally-based preschool program to both three-and four-year-olds. I am proud of what we have accomplished in a very short period of time."